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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the acquisition of a variety of standard English (SE) by children whose first language is Hawaii Creole English (HCE). The hypothesis was made that, in a speech community with high prestige and low prestige codes, learning the dominant code would not adversely affect performance in the first language. The subjects, in grades K-3, had no formal exposure to SE prior to entering school, and received no formal language training once in school. Their teachers used SE, but did not discourage the use of HCE. The subjects' performances over time in HCE and SE were measured by tests in HCE and SE. An analysis of the results shows that SE scores increased significantly in all four grades. Further, the subjects not only maintained HCE, but in three grades significantly increased their performance. Thus the acquisition of SE by the subjects, presumably through constant exposure to it in the school setting, did not result in a decrease in linguistic ability in HCE. This finding may be of significance in planning educational policies and practices. Apparently the immersion of children speaking a low prestige, creolized language into a school setting where the standard language is used exclusively can result in the children acquiring the latter while maintaining the former. (Author/CFM)

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Language Acquisition in a Bicultural Community: A Case Study of Bidialectalism[1]

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Introduction

Formal teaching of standard English (SE) to persons speaking so-called nonstandard languages or dialects is controversial. Supporters of formal efforts to foster bidialectalism argue that it is one way of insuring that members of minority groups who speak nonstandard codes will acquire a skill--speaking the socially dominant code--which will give them more economic opportunities. Its detractors, on the other hand, claim that it is a form of racism, among other detestable things (cf. Sledd 1972). In addition, it has been claimed that once speakers of minority dialects learn a variety of the standard language, they would lose their fluency in their first language. Finally, there is little evidence that bidialectalism can be achieved through formal instruction (cf. Day 1974).

Deciding that the situation required more data and less rhetoric, we investigated the acquisition of SE by children whose first language is Hawaii Creole English (HCE). Bidialectalism is used here to describe a situation in which children speak a low prestige, creolized language, HCE, while the school system utilizes SE. We hypothesized that the subjects would acquire SE without a formal SE language program, and that as they acquired SE, they would also maintain fluency in HCE. The results of

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our investigation support the hypothesis. For these subjects, learning the dominant language in a bicultural/bidialectal environment does not appear to affect adversely performance in their first language.[2]

Hawaii Creole English and Standard English

In Hawaii, HCE is a low prestige, creolized language, popularly called Pidgin. Varieties of HCE are spoken at many socio-economic levels in the state, with the more creolized forms found at the lower socio-economic end of the scale, and in the rural areas of the state.[3]

SE is also widely spoken throughout the Islands by persons of all ethnic backgrounds and at all socio-economic levels. SE, of course, is like HCE, a cover term for many varieties or dialects. One form or another of SE is usually the first language of children whose parents generally belong to the middle and upper socio-economic levels.

The Tests

As part of a larger project, two tests were designed and developed to measure the verbal performances in SE and HCE by young children. The tests, the Standard English Repetition Test (SERT) and the Hawaii Creole English Repetition Test (HCERT) respectively, are based on the technique of elicited imitation. For details of the tests' constructions, validity and reliability studies, and so on, see Day et al., 1974, and Day et al., 1975.

The SERT is a 15-sentence, 29-item test, administered by an adult speaking SE. It measures many of the main grammatical

features of SE, such as past tense, negation, question formation, and so on. The HCERT is a 22-sentence, 60-item test, administered by an adult apeaking HCE. It measures many of the major grammatical features of HCE, such as negation, past tense, question formation, and so on.

It should be noted that the HCERT may be more difficult than the SERT. An early version of the HCERT, based on the same sentences used in the SERT, was constructed by reducing a large pool of items on the basis of (1) low correlations with total score and (2) redundancy. This version was pilot-tested and was found to present no difficulties to kindergarten children in the HCE speech community. To increase the range of difficulty, additional sentences and features were added, features which tested more complicated HCE grammatical structures. (See Day et al., 1975, for additional information.)

The Sample

The subjects in this investigation were HCE-speaking children in grades K, 1, 2, and 3, who were students in an experimental school in Honolulu. One-quarter of the students can be characterized as coming from middle-class families; the remaining come from families which receive state financial aid. Many of the ethnic and racial groups in Hawaii were represented; however, three-quarters of the children had some percentage of Hawaiian ancestry. The results reported here are based on two administrations each of the HCERT and SERT. For the subjects in kindergarten and second grades, the tests were given eight

months apart--in September 1975, at the beginning of the school year, and in May 1976, at the end. The results from the first and third graders are taken from tests administered in September 1974, and May 1976, an interval of 20 months.

The Results

Tables 1-3 and Figure 1 show the results of the SERT and HCERT administrations.[4] Looking first at Table 1, we see a steady increase in the number of exact SE responses on the SERT by all subjects. The increase in correct responses by the subjects in the two classes with the shorter time span between administrations, classes 2 and 4, is not as great as the increase for the two classes with the 20-month time span. All differences were statistically significant by correlated *t*-tests. Except for class 2, the differences were $p<.001$.

Place Table 1 about here

These results are not at all unexpected. They are in keeping with the results of earlier studies, which show how increases on the SERT correlate with age and with exposure to an SE environment (cf. Day et al., 1974).

The results of the HCERT administrations show a similar picture (Table 2). The subjects had more exact HCE responses on the second administrations. As with the SERT results, correlated *t*-tests were used to test the reliability of mean

changes over time. For classes 1, 3, and 4, the levels of significance were at better than the .001 level (t = 4.22, 5.19, and 3.78, respectively). The subjects in class 2 showed no significant change (t = 0.57).

Place Table 2 about here

Table 3 is a summary of Tables 1 and 2; it shows the increases in percentages, since the two tests have a different number of total items. Figure 1 is a bar graph which illustrates clearly the increases in correct responses in both language varieties over time.

Place Table 3 and Figure 1 about here

For each subject in each class, SERT change scores were ranked from highest (i.e., the greatest increase from the first administration to the second) to the lowest. For classes 1 and 2, the top nine and the bottom nine scores were selected; for classes 3 and 4, the top ten and bottom ten. This selection yielded extreme score changes on the SERT for each class: Those that increased their scores the most formed one group (high change), while those whose scores increased only slightly or even decreased formed a second group (low change). Mean

exact HCE scores on the HCERT for these two extreme SERT groups were compared and tested by correlated *t*-tests. There were no significant differences in HCERT scores between the extreme SERT groups in any of the four classes (class 1--*t*= -0.08; class 2--*t*= 1.11; class 3--*t*= 1.25; class 4--*t*= -0.99).

Discussion

The two analyses of the SERT and HCERT data support the hypothesis that the acquisition of a standard language would not adversely affect a child's first, so-called nonstandard language. The first analysis showed how scores on both linguistic measures increased significantly for all classes but one. The second analysis, using change scores, demonstrated that there was no relationship between exact HCE change scores on the HCERT based on high and low exact SE change scores on the SERT.

The results may also suggest that HCE remained the dominant code for the subjects, even though the subjects made greater progress in SE. From Table 3 we see that class 3, for example, scored 56.5% mean exact HCE responses on the HCERT, and 38.3% mean exact SE responses on the SERT on the first administration. The second administration, 20 months later, shows the difference in mean exact scores narrowing considerably--70.7% on the HCERT to 65.9% on the SERT. This is a gain of 27.6% on the SERT, compared to an increase of 14.2% on the HCERT. This pattern of greater gains in SE but HCE receiving higher mean scores is found in the other three classes as well.

It should be pointed out that the hypothesis was rather

conservative. We predicted that the subjects' ability in HCE would not be adversely affected. In fact, the subjects in classes 1, 3, and 4 significantly increased their HCE performance.

That the hypothesis is confirmed is not unexpected. Theoretically, it is what one is led to believe should happen in bilingual situations. Research done by Lambert (e.g., 1972) demonstrated that schooling in a second language, French, in no way affects adversely school performance in the first, English. Ramirez and Politzer (1975), in a study of an English-and-Spanish bilingual program in grades K, 1, 3, and 5, reported that their subjects maintained their first language, Spanish, as they acquired English. Apparently the bidialectal situation in Hawaii does not differ from other bilingual situations in this regard.

That the hypothesis is supported may be of importance in shaping educational policies and practices. The subjects have not "lost" their first language. Children in a speech community where the vernacular is of low prestige (or non-mainstream) apparently can acquire the standard code (or mainstream dialect) and still maintain their first. Further, not only can the first language be maintained, but competence in it may also increase.

The subjects in this investigation had no formal SE language program. There was no instruction in learning to speak SE, such as might be found in a classroom of immigrant students learning English as a second language. The subjects were not given formal SE language instruction for several reasons. There were neither the materials nor the properly-trained teachers. Further, we

did not think that such a program would work since we believe that only those children motivated to do so will acquire a speaking capacity in SE. This belief is based on the assumption that speaking the socially accepted variety in a speech community is a matter of personal identification. Within the community, there are numerous opportunities for members of minority groups to acquire some form of the standard code. Undoubtedly many members of minority groups do utilize such opportunities. Valentine, for example, claimed that blacks are "more conversant with, and competence in, mainstream culture than most non-Black Americans believe or admit." (1971:156).

A systematic attempt was made to raise the status of HCE in the minds of the subjects' teachers. These teachers received lectures and readings on the history of pidgins and creoles in general and of HCE in particular, and on grammatical rules of HCE. They participated in discussions on the nature of language and on the logic of nonstandard dialects and languages, including HCE. These efforts to remove some of the stigma from HCE apparently had some value, for the teachers evidently accepted HCE as a language. They did not point out to the HCE-speaking children that there was another way of speaking. The teachers did not react in a negative manner when they used SE and the students replied in HCE. Apparently an environment was created in which the standard language was learned by children whose first language was nonstandard.

Conclusion

The results of our study may be summarized as follows:

(1) The subjects in all classes (grades K-3) significantly increased their scores on the SERT over a period of time, whether eight months or 20 months.

(2) The subjects in classes 1, 3, and 4 significantly increased their scores on the HCERT over time.

(3) The subjects in class 2 maintained their level of HCE over an eight-month period.

(4) Although SE proficiency increased, the subjects in general apparently remained more proficient in HCE.

The main conclusion which emerges from this investigation is that HCE-speaking children can acquire SE without losing fluency in HCE, and without a formal SE language program. The acquisition of SE takes place apparently as a result of continued exposure to SE in the school environment. We find no evidence to suggest that a loss of HCE would be a result of the acquisition of SE.

We should point out that our subjects live in an urban environment, one where both HCE and SE are used frequently. It would be very interesting to see if the same results could be obtained in an area which is less urban, one which is not as heavily exposed to SE. Subjects living in more rural areas might not be as inclined to the acquisition of SE as the subjects in this investigation are. Whether or not this would have any effect on HCE would be open to investigation.

Notes

[1]Earlier versions of the present paper were presented at the New York State English to Speakers of Other Languages & Bilingual Educators Association Sixth Annual Convention, Albany, N.Y., October 1976, and the Fifth Annual Colloquium on New Ways of Analyzing Variation Etc., Washington, D.C., October 1976. I thank all those who made substantive comments on the earlier drafts, particularly Doris Crowell, Ronald Gallimore, Gisela Speidel, and Roland Tharp.

[2]Wolfram and Christian (1975) offer a different interpretation of bidialectalism. They say it is the teaching of SE, with no attempt at eradicating the students' vernacular. According to their definition, our practice would not be bidialectalism, but would be one aimed at maintaining the non-mainstream dialect "with no attempt to teach standard English either as a replacement for the non-mainstream variety or as an addition to it." (1975:215). The subjects under discussion in the paper did not have a specific SE language program; however, all instruction was in SE, including reading. In this sense, the students were in a language-teaching process.

[3]For an insightful introduction to HCE, see Bickerton and Odo 1976.

[4]The test results in this paper are based on the number of exact repetitions (i.e. the total number of features which the subject repeated exactly as given by the examiner) on each test. For explanations of the scoring categories for each test, see Day et al., 1974 and Day et al., 1975.

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Class/Grade/ Time Span	Fall Mean	Fall SD	Spring Mean	Spring SD	Difference	t	p
4/Fall K to Spring K/ 8 months (N=26)	11.30	4.47	14.38	5.65	3.08+	4.37	.001
3/Fall K to Spring 1/ 20 months (N=25)	11.12	5.85	19.12	4.78	8.00+	10.95	.001
2/Fall 2 to Spring 2/ 8 months (N=23)	16.09	6.14	18.36	7.51	2.27+	3.65	.01
1/Fall 2 to Spring 3/ 20 months (N=23)	17.43	5.70	21.30	5.32	3.87+	6.11	.001

TABLE 1. Comparison of Mean Exact SE Scores on SERT for Grades K-3 over Two Time Periods.

Class/Grade/ Time Span	Fall Mean	Fall SD	Spring Mean	Spring SD	Difference	t	p
4/Fall K to Spring K/ 8 months (N=26)	36.61	9.12	40.23	8.78	3.62+	3.78	.001
3/Fall K to Spring 1/ 20 months (N=25)	33.88	10.36	42.44	9.05	8.56+	5.19	.001
2/Fall 2 to Spring 2/ 8 months (N=23)	43.52	8.28	44.00	8.46	0.48+	0.57	ns
1/Fall 2 to Spring 3/ 20 months (N=23)	41.73	7.35	48.30	7.36	6.57+	4.22	.001

TABLE 2. Comparison of Mean Exact HCE Scores on HCERT for Grades K-3 over Two Time Periods.

			SERT			HCERT		
Class	Grade	N	Fall %	Spring %	Change	Fall %	Spring %	Change
4	K-K	26	38.9	49.6	+10.7%	61.0	67.1	+ 6.1%
3	K-1	25	38.3	65.9	+27.6%	56.5	70.7	+14.2%
2	2-2	23	55.5	63.3	+ 7.8%	72.5	73.3	+ 0.8%
1	2-3	23	60.1	73.4	+13.3%	69.6	80.5	+10.9%

TABLE 3. Percentages of Mean Exact Scores on SERT and HCERT for Grades K-3 over Two Time Periods.

Classes 1 and 3 = 20 months

Classes 2 and 4 = 8 months

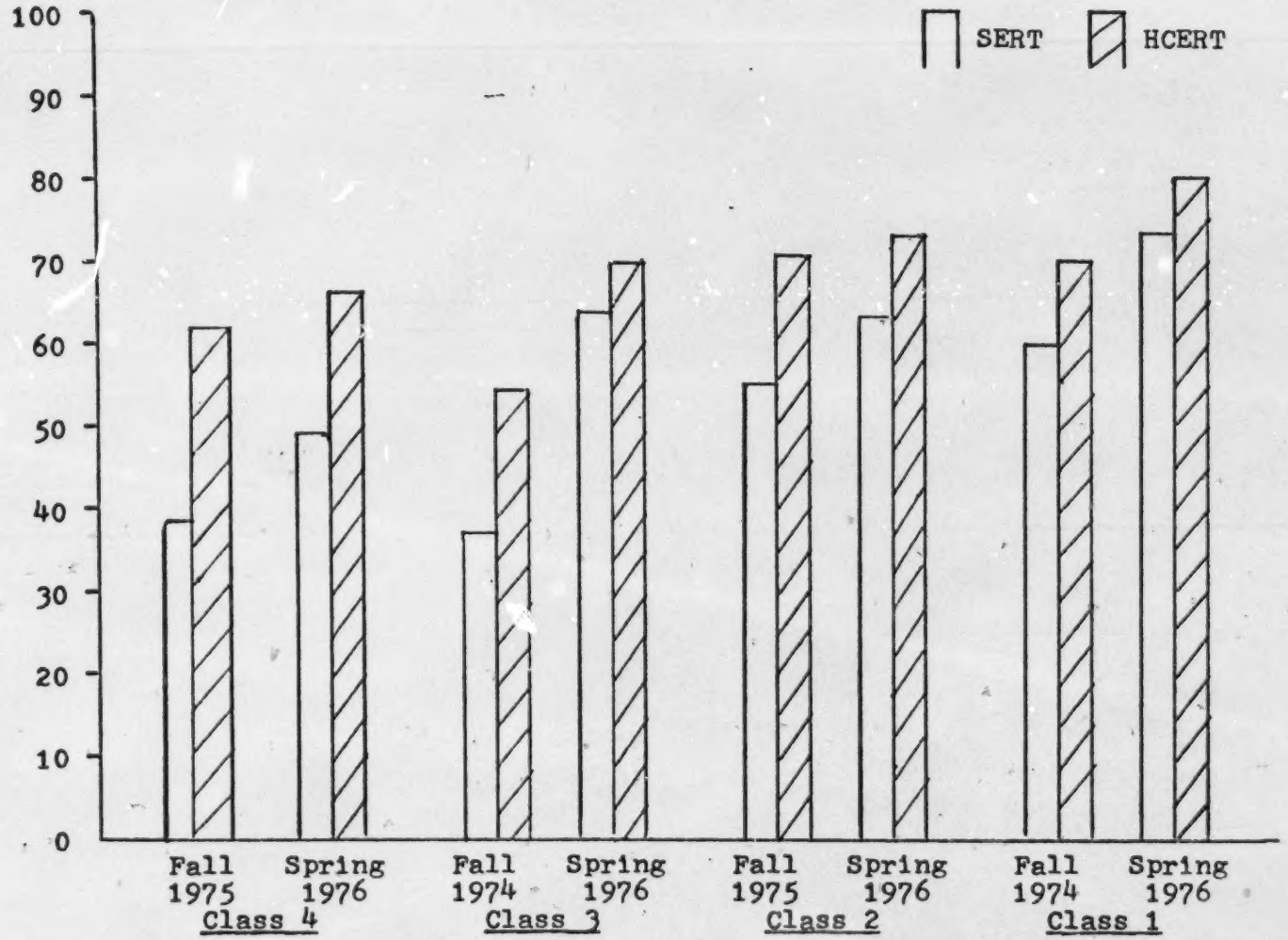

FIGURE 1. Percentages of Mean Exact Scores on SERT and HCERT